

# Mapping Taiwan: Strategies of Taiwan's International Art Biennials

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## Abstract

There are two important projects that serve as significant channels for contemporary art development and venues for international communication: the Taipei Biennial and the Venice Biennial, Taipei Pavilion. Neither project is large, yet each is flexible, energetic, and recognized by the international art press. The biennials play a positive role in promoting Taiwan's cultural diplomacy. They also gain international exposure for artists, leading to the positive reception of their works. They have received invitations to various other international art expos and biennials, and sold their works to private collectors and museums. The international recognition of their achievements have inspired greater artistic creativity, broadened the vision of local curators, and revived up the engine of the art market. These factors have all had a great influence upon the prosperity of the artistic environment in Taiwan.

**Key words:** museum, art exhibition, exhibition strategy, biennial, Taipei Biennial

## 1. Introduction

The Taipei Biennial is now taking place at the Taipei Museum of Fine Arts(TFAM). Curated by Manray Hsu [Germany/Taiwan] and Vasif Kortun [Turkey], it is the 6th event of its kind held in Taipei. Since its inauguration in 1983, TFAM has promoted modern and contemporary art, organizing many exhibitions and competitions to fulfill its mission. After more than a decade of modifications, in 1998 the Taipei Biennial instituted a revolutionary change. In order to adapt to the international 'biennial' trend while promoting Taiwan's contemporary art abroad to draw international acclaim, the TFAM began to invite internationally-renowned curators to cooperate with local Taiwanese curators, marking the first time that Taiwan held an international art biennial. One can view the outcomes of the most recent 2008 Taipei Biennial as a sign of healthy progress in both a local and global context of biennial politics.

### 1) Eschewing the use of a thematic subject for the 2008 Taipei Biennial

This is the first biennial simply named "2008 Taipei Biennial." One can ascertain that the curatorial strategy emphasized free artistic expression rather than restricting the theme to the criteria and taste of the curators. Artists do not offer answers to life, yet their works of art allow us appreciate the great diversity of people and cultures. The organizers invited artists to Taipei to contribute new works for the show. They hoped to foster interaction between these artists, each of whom had a unique perspective to share, with the people of Taipei.<sup>1)</sup>

1) "While art does not provide answers, it has the capacity to reflect on these issues from multiple angles, to work with different forms of enquiry and determine when to focus on individual moments. As with the approach of the Biennial, no story is infinitely singular. Each area of focus is associated with many other questions, for example, the mobility of a tourist, a temporary worker, or a foreign bride are certainly not the same, not even similar. Towards this end, the Biennial has been commissioning as many new works as possible, or asking the participating artists to rethink and adapt previous projects in light of their presentation in Taipei. There will also be existing works presented in juxtaposition to the new ones. The exhibition will include thematic compilations and farcical and biting videos." <http://www.taipeibiennial.org/TBThemes/Mytheme.aspx?Language=>



## 2) "The War of Globalization" as a core concept behind the biennial

A core concept of the show, the "war of globalization," is not limited simply to physical wars between nations and people. Instead, it explores topics such as border tensions, migration, dissent and informal politics, urban transformation, and issues of globalization.<sup>2)</sup> In Taiwan, debates regarding immigration and illegal labor, mobility, borders, divided states and micro-nations, permanent states of war, ecological breakdown, global unrest, and the opportunities for change are also major issues shared with many other countries. Reflexive questions were also raised upon the significance of art biennial as a phenomena of global politics.

## 3) Art projects that reflect upon quotidian activities to increase their impact

The format of the show is a reflection of both physical and virtual territory, expanding outwards from the physical walls of the museum. It utilizes many different sites in the city, such as the old beer factory, the mega-digital screen at the Taipei Arena, public parks, Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) stations, and local private properties. The Biennial also placed advertisements on a number of city billboards, spreading the exhibition's message throughout different neighborhoods and bringing the project into view when least expected.

Aside from the core project, another exhibition organized for the Biennial is entitled "A World Where Many Worlds Fit." The Biennial also features a collaborative project with the Dictionary of War (DOW), namely a creative forum for people interested in the theme of modern "war" in different social contexts.<sup>3)</sup> The outreach programs continue to encourage more debate and dialogue during the special biennial event. Very inspiring, but quite novel for the local audience.

## 4) Strategic partnership and joint efforts

Although the funding always appears insufficient, organizers find creative ways to team up with different parties, networks, and institutes to increase the impact of the

show. The Biennial partners with two other city biennials, namely the Shanghai Biennale and the GZ(Guangzhou) Triennial, to create a communication platform among cities and people and engage in branding efforts to enhance cultural capital. Moreover, twelve art academies worldwide are providing a platform for talented young artists through a special project called "Taipei Drift."<sup>4)</sup> The Urban Nomad Film Program also helps to keep the exhibition's spirit alive through six weeks of free indigenous film screenings.

This Biennial thus has the capacity to create and respond to a diverse set of opportunities, which curators and artists alike can subsequently explore.<sup>5)</sup> Works from many different parts of the world were included in the biennial, totally 37 nations, that shall be the best opportunity to bridge up the culture innocence of the local people. However, educational

2) In particular, participants of the forum will consider the more complex and local examples of war in relation to Taiwan's geographical and historical background, such as its relationship with China and the influence of the United States and Japan on military, cultural and other aspects of Taiwanese society. <http://www.taipeibiennial.org/ContentPage/Contents.aspx?ID=6&SubID=79&Language=2>

3) DOW is an ongoing collaborative platform where concepts of war are invented, arranged and presented by scientists, artists, theorists and activists at public two-day events. The aim is to create key notions of thought, that have so far been neglected, or have yet to be created, that can play a significant role in current discussions on the topic of war. The program consists of a presentation, documentation, supplementary material ([www.dictionaryofwar.org](http://www.dictionaryofwar.org)) and a print publication.

4) The title of the workshop is derived from the cult movie Tokyo Drift. The approach will not only stress the notion of different levels of 'shifting and speeding' in a given space, but will also attempt to reach beyond the city's boundaries. The project is organized by the College of Fine Arts of Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), with the guest institutions Kunsthochschule Kassel in der Universität Kassel (Germany), Finnish Academy of Fine Arts (Finland), Lasalle-Sia College of the Arts (Singapore), École Nationale Supérieure d'Art de Bourges (France), University of Cape Town (South Africa), Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design (Israel), University of Michigan (USA), Academy of Fine Arts in Prague (Czech Republic), Griffith University (Australia), the Chosun University of Art (Korea), and Tainan University of Arts. The workshop aims to navigate issues in contemporary art and culture with an anchor in Taipei. To this end a range of excursions, site visits and conversations will be initiated in order to experience Taipei's urban space as a psycho-geography. Experiments, collaborations, brainstorming tools, and workshops will be encouraged throughout the workshop.

5) 2008 TAIPEI BIENNIAL, concept, <http://www.taipeibiennial.org/TBThemes/Mytheme.aspx?Language=2>, 20081001



program never seem to be well-supporting this big event. We shall then raise the question, if the biennial is not target for the local audience, then what would be the goals and strategies of the biennials.

## 2. The Biennial: End or Means

Beginning in the 1990s, countries across Asia began organizing contemporary art biennials, named after the cities in which they are held, such as Korea's *Kwangju Biennial* and *Busan Biennial*, Japan's *Yokohama Triennial* and *Fukuoka Triennial*, China's *Shanghai Biennial* and *Guangzhou Triennial*, Australia's *Sidney Biennial* and the *Singapore Biennial*. International Biennials and Triennials have grown into extremely important cultural markers in the cities that hold them, and remain a crucial strategy for emerging on the international contemporary art stage.<sup>6)</sup>

In recent years Asians have recognized the importance of contemporary art in the development of culture and many countries are now busy planning their own biennial exhibitions. They hope to facilitate international cultural exchange as well as promote cultural creative industries and reap the economic benefits. The New York Times has even created a new word – Biennialistic – to describe the global biennial phenomenon. However, is the Biennial an end or means? If it is an end, then what has been accomplished?

### 1) Background Review

In light of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum's 25 years of history, the inception of international biennials falls in accordance with the ambitious goals that Taiwan has projected for itself, including its great desire for participation in the international community. As a powerful institution that serves as the locus for exhibitions, the TFAM has organised events that reflect the shifts in roles and purposes of art exhibitions under changing times.

The Taipei Fine Arts Museum was founded in 1983 to promote modern art and international culture exchanges. On

the one hand, advancing international exhibitions of modern art encourage creative experimentation by young artists, allowing them to counterbalance the mainstream forces prevalent in academia. On the other hand, these exhibitions correspond to the highly anticipated trend of socio-cultural modernization that transpired in the 80's following rapid economic growth in Taiwan. To a certain extent, fine art museums represent the positive growth and achievements of a modern society. As early as 1983, when the International Biennial Print Exhibition, R.O.C. opened at the TFAM, organizers began incorporating the nation's name into the exhibition theme to ensure national recognition, funding, and support. It was clear even then that international exhibitions serve as useful channels for trans-national art communication.

Other early exhibitions at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum included modern Korean art and American paper works. Exhibitions on themes of modernity revealed the way in which Taiwanese society imagined as well as anticipated the modernisation of art. From the 1980s to the early 1990s, TFAM organised nearly 50 displays and exhibits containing the term "modern" in their titles. Besides introducing a range of international modern art exhibitions, TFAM also sponsored thematic exhibitions featuring Taiwanese art at various fine art museums around the world. These exhibitions and also research papers have provided a significant discourse which communicates Taiwan's burgeoning knowledge of art.

### 2) Goals and Strategies of the Taiwan Pavilion exhibitions at the Venice Biennale

The Taiwan Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia (The Venice Biennale) was enthusiastically organised by TFAM in 1995. The Taiwan Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia, in particular, exemplifies Taiwanese diplomatic art marketing, while the Taipei Biennial is meant to draw international attention upon the Taiwanese artistic perspective. In terms of exhibiting capacity, number of participating countries and visiting spectators, La Biennale di Venezia is the largest international biennial event in the world. It is the quintessential stage for global contemporary art and the artists who flock there.<sup>7)</sup>

The Venice Biennale of Art, Taiwan Pavilion represents a

6) 2008 TAIPEI BIENNIAL, concept, <http://www.taipeibiennial.org/ContentPage/Contents.aspx?ID=3&SubID=23&Language=2>



crucial door through which Taiwanese art could make its entry into the international art world. Here, the successful application of exhibition mechanisms and strategies are both important.<sup>8)</sup> Regarding the attention placed upon the development of Taiwan's contemporary visual arts, the exhibition strategies to internationalize Taiwanese arts have made strong positive contributions.<sup>9)</sup> The cultural connotations were made apparent by repeatedly inserting the word "Taiwan" in the first three titles. It was evident that TFAM intended to focus international attention upon current artistic developments in Taiwan, show the depth of Taiwanese art, gain international recognition for the Taiwanese state, and at the same time, realize the people's dreams of global acknowledgement of Taiwan.

Such exposure at an international event signifies that Taiwanese artists have received equal opportunities to compete in and engage with the wider international art arenas. It certainly encourages and excites the local contemporary art community, and for over ten years the Venice Biennale of Art, Taiwan Pavilion has become a major event, attracting enormous attention from the domestic and foreign arts community. Many artists and curators have since received invitations to attend other celebrated international exhibitions. The curator for the 2001 Taiwan Pavilion, Man-Ray Hsu, who was also one of the two curators for the 2000 Taipei Biennial, was later invited to serve on the jury at the Venice Biennale. Some participating artists also received invitations to exhibit their work at international exhibitions. Chien-Chi Chang was invited to the 25th Bienal de São Paulo in Brazil; Daniel Lee to England, Ming-Wei Lee to Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City and Museum of East Asian Art (Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst) in Berlin; and Michael Lin to Mori Art Museum in Tokyo and Lyon Biennial. As far as the artists are concerned, acceptance by TFAM and its curators to take part in the Venice Biennale means that they have the opportunity to display their artistic talents to the world. It also goes without saying that the Venice Biennale has greatly influenced and invigorated Taiwanese artists.

In terms of diplomacy, Taiwan has indeed impressed the international audience with its brilliant cultural achievements. As Taiwan and its aesthetics of imagery and contemporary artistic development interfaced directly with the international

community, the country participated in more international cultural exchanges. This is testimony to the success of Taiwan's shrewd international art strategies. The nation encourages contemporary artists to express themselves in

- 7) 1995年第45屆台灣館的當代藝術，以「台灣藝術」為題，由評審團選出連德誠、黃進河、吳瑪俐、侯俊明、黃志陽參展。他們以不同於西方的藝術風貌，展現區域性文化特質。1997年第46屆由評審團選出王俊傑、吳天章、姚瑞中、李明則及陳建北參展，主題為「台灣，台灣：面目全非」；由台灣歷史發展的分歧多元來突顯社會環境變遷之快速及藝術發展與社會現況的互動。1999年第47屆，由評審團選出策展人石瑞仁，以「意亂情迷：台灣藝術三線路」為題，邀請藝術家黃步青、陳界仁、洪東祿參展。2001年第48屆策展人高千惠，以「活性因子」為題，邀請王文志、林書民、林明弘、劉世芬、張乾琦參展，探討台灣當代藝術生產中的文化基因，與人類社會文明發展中共有的變異元素。2003年第50屆由林書民策展「心感地帶」，邀請鄭淑麗、李小鏡、李明維、袁廣鳴參展。展覽內容以Limbo做為隱喻探討介於夢想與衝突間的灰色區塊，藉以探討世界急速變幻下台灣轉換的現狀，以影喻烏托邦與現實之間不斷快速加大的鴻溝。2005年第51屆選出策展人王嘉驥，以「自由的限度」為題，邀請高重黎、崔廣宇、郭奕臣及林欣怡參展。其中，姚瑞中、劉世芬、陳界仁、黃步青、林明弘、張乾琦等多位藝術家作品因此獲得國際藝評人士的讚賞並受邀至其他國際藝術展覽展出，就國際藝壇對我國當代視覺藝術發展狀況之關注上，美術館的貢獻是積極具體的。檢視展覽標題所蘊藏的文化意涵，前三次的展覽標題中均出現「台灣」一詞，第三次的「台灣，台灣：面目全非」一展更重複「台灣」兩次，突顯出美術館希望藉此導引國際視聽，正視台灣的美術現況，再則強調台灣邁進世界舞台取得國際認證的期待。
- 8) The 1995 topic was "Taiwanese Art", and Te-Cheng Lien (連德誠), Chi-Ho Huang (黃進河), Mali Wu (吳瑪俐), Chun-Ming Hou (侯俊明) and Ji-Yang Huang (黃致陽) were the participating artists selected by the museum jury. Their artworks exhibited characteristics of regional cultures that are quite distinctive from those of the West. In the 1997 "Facing Faces-Taiwan Taiwan" exhibition, art by Jun-lieh Wang (王俊傑), Tien-Chang Wu (吳天章), Jui-Chung Yao (姚瑞中), Ming-Tse Lee (李明則) and Chien-Pei Chen (陳建北) was displayed to highlight, in context of Taiwan's vastly divided and diversified history, the rapid social changes in the environment as well as the intertwining complexities between artistic development and the status quo. Curator Jui-Jen Shih (石瑞仁) was chosen by the jury in 1999 to be responsible for selecting artists and works of art for the Taiwan Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale. The exhibition was entitled "Close to Open", and the participating artists include Buh-Ching Hwang (黃步青), Chieh-Jen Chen (陳界仁) and Tung-Lu Hung (洪東祿). Among others, works by Jui-Chung Yao (姚瑞中), Shih-Fen Liu (劉世芬), Chieh-Jen Chen (陳界仁), Buh-Ching Hwang (黃步青), Michael Lin (林明弘) and Chien-Chi Chang (張乾琦) had been well-received by international art critics, and the artists were subsequently invited to exhibit at other international art events.
- 9) 自1992年起的「台北現代美術雙年展」，從自我定位到與國際接軌，以及國際媒體對於台灣當代藝術的報導，再加上多位藝術家的國際展現，如李銘盛受邀威尼斯，袁廣鳴受邀舊金山現代美術館展出，李明維受邀於美國惠特尼美術館、紐約現代美術館展出等等，皆指出台灣藝術家的傑出表現終獲得國際藝壇的肯定及讚賞。



bold and creative ways, and encourages them to strive to represent their country abroad. That is why the Venice Biennale, Taiwan Pavilion works so well; it serves not only as an outwardly-oriented international event but also as an inwardly-directed exhibition strategy to stimulate progress in artistic development. In other words, such international events are not simply aimed at sharing and exchanging experiences in the fields of art and culture. They also have greater implications upon marketing strategies that advance Taiwan's contemporary art into the global art scene via international exhibition institutions.

### 3) Goals and Strategies of the Taipei Biennial

The first Taipei Biennial was organised in 1998, entitled "Site of Desire". The subject matter represents Asian's desire to search for a new identity in the developing forces of modernity. Desire is the origin of everything that there ever is. The intense desires expressed by the people, nations, ethnicities and moral groups of Asia have also turned out to be the source of human potential and human evolution. The following Taipei Biennial, "Sky Is the Limit" in 2000 was organised in terms of collaboration projects or research camps. Artists and the audience were invited to both play and perform whole-heartedly with physical movements. This exhibition questions and examines arrival of a globalisation era. Currently, the blending cultures and endless choices on offer have produced a new class of "fusion cultures". Cultural boundaries are constantly being eroded, resulting in the formation of a continuously mixing culture, with all of us under one and the same sky, joined together to face the unknown future. The theme for the 2002 Biennial was "Great Theatre of the World", which shows our deep-going experiences in this "world". The fine art museum turns into a theatre, and the displays were just like plays that were staged one after the other. The 2004 Taipei Biennial, "Do You Believe in Reality?" gives contemporary artists an opportunity to record, imitate, and comment on reality. It also lets the artists present the reality of life as they experience it in their individualistic ways, which in turn provide the grounds for

critical self-introspection. The 2006 topic was "Dirty Yoga." Popularly received world-wide, Yoga was a symbol for healthy life and attitude, but now under the context of global consumption, the notion signifies contradictory values and forms.

Taipei Biennials exert quite positive effects. First, it is highly inspirational for local Taiwanese audience to be exposed to such a wide range of artworks through the exhibiting mechanisms of TFAM. Not only works of art are brought out in these exhibitions, but also other social structures, historical frameworks and cultural lineages from which these works of art originate are put on view. It becomes feasible to learn about works of art that come from different nations and continue to be juxtaposed in various perspectives, in different geographical/historical contexts, or indeed represented by alternating materials in the space of heterogeneity. Hence, the Biennials are not meant to be trendy, or to produce favourable figures for the TFAM simply by inviting international artists. It is beneficial to have biennials of contemporary arts, for it is not limited to any region, or characteristic of solely one particular culture, ethnicity. Nor is it just trying to transport the entire system of local arts, history or culture over here for the presentation."<sup>10)</sup>

Secondly, every thematic subject of the Taipei Biennial presents the Taiwanese audience with critical issues that really matter in this day and age, offering them a glimpse of international contemporary arts while they shuffle in and out of the displaying spectacles and trendy fashions. In addition, the Taipei Biennials stimulate our extremely capitalist society with antitheses and alternative discourses through these exhibitions. The Taiwanese public are thus given an extraordinary opportunity to see the world from a new angle, to appreciate different cultures and artists' unusual ways of thinking, and in turn reflect and contemplate on where Taiwan stands in relation to the greater world outside.

Thirdly, the Biennial continue to construct and challenge art debates and discourse in Taiwan. Starting from the 80s avant-garde exhibitions that were intended to modernise fine arts, through the 90s artistic debates between internationalisation and localisation, as well as the enquiries into the subjectivity of Taiwanese arts, to the reflections on the issues of globalisation, the power of the curator and the exhibiting mechanisms at the international biennials in the 21st

10) 張至維整理, 〈2006台北雙年展(限制級)瑜珈—展覽室對話:林志明 × 劉紀蕙Gallery Talk on 2006 Taipei Biennial: Dirty Yoga〉, 《現代美術》, 第130期, 2007年2月, 頁42-49。



century, the project has been the catalyst for the arts world and the discourses of knowledge in Taiwan. The extensive influences of the exhibiting strategies and manipulating mechanisms are made clear in the fact that the current knowledge is formed with issues concerning and discussions of internationalisation, localisation, the international biennials and Curatorship.

Characterised by its youthful vigour, the small-medium sized Taipei Biennial is increasingly visible to the international art world and has garnered publicity in the international media. The Taipei Biennial is a major fixture in the Taiwanese contemporary art community and drives its continued development. It also acts as the space for Taiwan to initiate connections and communications with the international art scene. As TFAM attempts to facilitate the development of the artistic environment in Taiwan, the Taipei Biennial has emerged as an influential and crucial exhibition. This in turn lends insight into the arts phenomena of Taiwan as a newly industrialised developed country.<sup>11)</sup>

### 3. Why Biennials? Some reflection under circumstances

#### 1) Quest for International Recognition

What is the 'internationalization' of art exhibitions? And why? Again, it is an end or means? As socio-cultural changes took place in Taiwan, an understanding of what is meant by "internationalization" developed various aspects and new directions. The arts community in Taiwan has long been characterised by a heightened sense of cultural angst and apprehension, faced with the complexities of international politics and the intervening forces of Western cultural hegemony. The major concern of the community during the mid 1990s was the way in which the exhibiting policies at fine art museums would underline international strategies for Taiwanese art. The exhibition strategy of the museum is to emerge as a vibrant international artistic center. Moving from a peripheral position towards the center, how might the museum move towards meeting the high expectations held in artistic circles?

Shih Jui-Jen, who served at the museum as head of the

Exhibition Department, also pointed out that during the 1980s, "Taiwanese art's entering into the international art world" and 'Advancing Taiwanese art into the United Nations of arts' are the most expressed hopes in our art community." During the early 1990s, the dialectic between artistic modernization and the discourse regarding Taiwan's indigenous art brought about new societal expectations of the museum's "internationalizing" exhibiting directions.

The organization of Taipei Biennials signifies that Taiwan is developing as a locale where "international" cultures encounter each other. This is also the main reason why Taiwan boasts many "international" exhibitions and conferences: Taiwanese hope to achieve greater levels of international communication and create more beneficial cultural policies. Perhaps Taiwan's colonial history partially contributes to its anxious desire for international recognition and its eager search for cultural subjectivity.<sup>12)</sup> The Taipei Biennial thus in effect demonstrates an exhibition strategy that is meant to brand Taipei as a vibrant international city, while the Venice Biennale, Taiwan Pavilion is meant to market Taiwanese arts internationally.

#### 2) Biennials as a global platform of dialogues?

"Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Scandals and Reform, or Twenty Years of Government Administered Art In Taiwan, 1984-2004," written by the German art historian Felix Schöber, also declared the politics of exhibition. He pointed out in his essay that the international art-related functions were actually contingency measures in diplomatic crises, administered to realise the objectives of communicating with the international world by the means of art culture, and furthermore, acknowledge the fact that Taiwan does indeed exist. "Taipei Biennials" stage the world in Taiwan, using the exhibiting spaces of the museum to accomplish Taiwanese arts' international fame, and to broaden local audience's perspectives on the diversity of culture.<sup>13)</sup>

11) 黃位政, 〈從雙年展的變革談台灣藝術現象〉, 《現代美術》, 第80期, 1998年10月, 頁40。

12) 同上註。

13) F. Schöber, "Taipei Fine Arts Museum: scandals and reform, or twenty years of government administered art in Taiwan, 1984-2004," *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. Taipei: Art & Collection Group Ltd., 2004, pp.5-23.



Using Biennials as an important platform of dialogues between the Taiwanese and the international, how may the contradictions inherent in the discrepancies between the local and the international be resolved? Are localisation and internationalisation two ends of the pendulum? In the conflicts and contradictions between the opposing forces of localisation and internationalisation, perhaps "globalization" can offer a viable thinking dimension and a turning point. Globalisation means "the process in which nation states and their sovereignties are oppressed and penetrated under operations of power opportunities, dimensions, identities and networks of the transnational." "Globalization signifies the end of the era of national politics (sovereign nation-states). Today actors of nation states must share the global stage and global power with international organisations and transnational corporations and societies. This dynamics regards globalisation as a kind of polycentric world politics, characterised by the interactions between national societies and transnational contexts."<sup>14)</sup>

However, culture analyst Wu Chin-tao also remarked, "In the global art scene, it is the aspired prospect for cities in 'developing' countries to be internationalized.... This is a way of connecting with the international world, and Taipei Biennial is no exception."<sup>15)</sup> Fang-Ming Chen suggested, "Under the waves of globalisation, the Taiwanese intelligentsia is forced to take a stance on localisation in its resistance. On the other hand, however, from the perspectives of enlightenment, it is in favour of critically embracing modernisation in order to challenge not just the hegemony of any particular imperialist culture, but a more profound and extensive culture of late capitalism. These cultural traditions of critical thinking enhance the indigenous social movements, and also enable the examination of the

positioning of Taiwanese culture in a global context."<sup>16)</sup>

Internationalization or globalization, the underlying foundation of these thematic exhibitions is inevitably an academic discourse or a notion of culture. Nevertheless, Taiwan constantly finds itself positioned in the periphery. How might Taiwanese curators effectively develop their own cultural perspectives when contemporary theories of philosophy, sociology, and aesthetics are largely Anglo-European centric? How might they formulate indigenous cultural discourses that emphasize the presence of the Taiwanese case? Are we actually serve as the "other" machine that repeated the production and perspectives of the superpower in the world of international art world?

Amy Cheng, who was appointed curator for the 2004 Taipei Biennial, commented on this matter, saying that "the Taipei Biennial wants to be an international exhibition of internationalization, but at the same time it lacks international visibility. This is the case mainly because one, it is only one of the many global biennial exhibitions and it cannot attract the international audience too much if it is not intensely unique in the region. Two, its very limited budget means that it is unlikely to achieve the desired goals. More work needs to be done, and perhaps some long-term package deals, such as formulation of topical issues, establishment of domestic as well as international forum or discursive institutions, operations of international public relations and so on, must be thought out and implemented in order to overcome these difficulties."<sup>17)</sup> In addition, the current policy of having two curators for each year's Taipei Biennial, while intended to highlight the international characteristic of the exhibitions by having a foreign curator, actually reflects Taiwan's inability to overcome its post-colonial past, even during the process of engendering exhibition strategies.<sup>18)</sup> The international curator and the Taiwanese curator are treated differently, in terms of their respective authority in selecting of works of art and choosing thematic narratives; their curatorial perspectives; the level of respect and power granted to each; and the rewards that each curator receives.

### 3) City Branding

Does the Taipei Biennial really resonate with Taipei City's

14) 參閱貝克 (Ulrich Bech) 著, 孫治本譯, 《全球化危機》(Was ist Globalisierung?), 台北: 台灣商務, 2002, 頁14。

15) 吳金桃, 〈國際化的文化政治〉, 《典藏今藝術》, 台北: 典藏雜誌社, 第147期, 2004, 頁92。

16) Fang-Ming Chen (陳芳明), Foreword to *Rethinking Postcolonial Literary Criticism in Taiwan*, Taipei, Rye Field Publishing, 2003: p.5-7.

17) 鄭慧華口述, 簡子傑訪談, 〈雙年展的制度〉, 《愛咪囀語隨便記》, 2004, 網頁<http://goya.bluecircus.net/archives/003430.html> (典藏雜誌)。

18) 2004年台北雙年展「在乎現實嗎」由比利時Barbara Vanderlinden與台灣的鄭慧華擔任策展人, 惟展覽當天鄭慧華拒絕出席開幕典禮, 旨在控訴比利時策展人的專斷獨斷, 無視與台灣策展人的溝通協調。



greater cultural marketing scheme under the broader structures of polycentric world politics? Lin Hong-chang remarks apprehensively that the institutions of international biennials are in fact homogeneous representations of a globalised cultural logic. Internationally renowned curators and artists travel around the world and frequent these biannual events, when 'multi-national/cultural' becomes a prerequisite feature of international biennial exhibitions. In the institutionalized processes of international biennial exhibitions, multi-cultural elements of representations are decoded or recoded, endlessly reproduced, and transformed into a certain kind of globalised cultural logic.

By showing their distinctive artistic styles in these international events, transnational artists and curators can often come to represent the arts and cultures of their origins, or their culture's legitimate status within international artistic institutions.<sup>19)</sup> Therefore the Taipei Biennial, in its determination to market Taipei City internationally, will require more than merely vigorous and thorough exhibiting planning on the part of TFAM. Taipei City itself must create a litany of changes in its urban marketing decisions would also be a necessity. Taipei City's urban marketing decisions require the incorporation and implementation of many changes. Fortunately, through the effort on the selection of curators, construction of the core concept, strategic partnership with quite a number of ally institutions and community-based projects of the 2008 Taipei Biennial, we do witness an reflective attitude for more creative possibility.

#### 4. Open question as conclusion

##### 1) Professional performance

Being up against the overwhelming global capitalism and the economic and political changes in Taiwan on a societal level, when social resources are becoming increasingly scarce, the question remains whether exhibition professionalism would be able to go beyond limits of budget, political ideologies, and uphold the projects in the art world. Senior curator at the TFAM Fang-Wei Chang believes that the general consensus in international cooperation is to demonstrate the professional performance; "The ideal vision,

"art for art's sake," is the only recourse to this dire situation for Taiwan in the midst of political intricacies of an Anglo-European centric art world. For Taiwanese artists, curators, art critics and administrators, it is even more important than ever to be astute and independent."<sup>20)</sup> The thornier it gets for Taiwan's situation in the realities of international politics, the better art professionalism has to be.

Since 1998, the Taipei Biennial and the works exhibited have introduced new artistic ideas from around the world that act as a driver of dialogue between Taiwan and other international cultures. The exhibitions held over the past decade have not only increased the visibility of Taiwanese contemporary art on the world stage, but have also successfully involved Taiwan in the Asian and global international art network. The biennial has also broadened Taiwan's artistic vision and its capacity to produce professional, well-organized exhibitions. The event has likewise helped Taiwan gain exposure in the international media. The biennial has become a primary symbol of Taiwan's contemporary artistic development and international artistic exchange.

##### 2) Subjectivity of the biennials

With its continued efforts in organising Taipei Biennial and the Venice Biennale, Taiwan Pavilion, which have effectively established the international fame for Taipei City and Taiwan's contemporary arts, the museum has successfully and sufficiently played the role in promoting contemporary arts in Taiwan. Consequently, exhibition issues related to the international-ness and local-ness of contents, the results of curatorial directions and strategies, the power play and the allocation of resources have been generated. All of these have facilitated the increased development, in depth as well as scope, of academic discourses in Taiwan. The international biennial functions to stimulate Taiwanese society, connecting it to the rest of the world. It also acts as a platform on which Taiwan is able to communicate with the international

19) 林宏璋,《後當代藝術徵候:書寫於在地之上》,台北,典藏藝術家庭,2005,頁12-13.

20) Fang-Wei Chang (張芳薇)(2002), "Of Course, Art for Art's Sake; Politics Is another Business Altogether," published in *Artist Magazine*, Issue. 325, p.128.



community, through the observation and greater understanding of social phenomena that concern other countries in the world today.

Exhibition strategy focuses decidedly upon the internationalization of urban culture in Taipei. The problems pertaining to the act of selection - the selection of curators, artwork, the exhibition theme, or the allocation of resources, for example - underscores the fact that the principal audiences of the Taipei Biennial, namely Taiwanese artists and the public, are often neglected or even excluded during

this process. Which directors are in charge of the exhibitions? What qualifies the curator to make authoritative decisions regarding the final themes, organisations, and the selection of artists? Who possesses the power to influence exhibitions? Is it the curator, the director, the mayor of Taipei, the artists, or the public? What kind of communication projects should be undertaken to gap up the bridge between the public and the international biennials? When and how shall the public become the subjectivity of the biennials?